

High Calling **Ephesians 4:1-6**

Have you ever been part of something so important that it changed the way you lived your life? One of the first things I think about is when people go into the military – when an 18 year old kid takes off for bootcamp, the next time you see them something's different. You can just see the change that's come over them. They walk different, they stand different. They look different, talk different.

Some of our careers do the same thing – people kind of take on certain characteristics that seem to fit the career path they're on. It effects their lifestyle, the people they hang out with, their schedule. In some cases a club or a team can change the way we live – when someone becomes a firefighter it's like you can just see some kind of difference. When I was in high school, sports were really important to me and for football and basketball when it was game day we dressed up nice – we had to, but it was so important to us that it was kind of like a badge of honor to wear a shirt and tie to school.

When something is really important, it changes the way we live our lives. This morning I want to look at a passage of Scripture that talks about changing the way we live our lives because of something very important that we become a part of when we become a Christian, and that's the church. When we put our trust in Christ and decide to follow him, we become part of his family, the church. Should that change the way we live our lives? Is belonging to the church that big of a deal? How important is it to belong to a church family? Are you different because you're part of Christ's church?

The elders had a retreat this weekend and the passage we spent a lot of time on was Ephesians 4:1-16. We spent time in it at the retreat, but also leading up to the retreat. So, since I had limited time this week and since we're in between sermon series', I decided to preach on the same passage. It seems that no matter how much time I spend studying a passage and how familiar I think I am with it, there's always more in it than I realize and that's what I discovered this week in Ephesians 4. I knew it had to do with the importance of the church, but my eyes were opened a lot more to just how important it is.

Ephesians is a letter written by Paul to a church he planted – so in that way it's similar to 1 Corinthians which we just finished studying. The culture they were in was also similar to the culture in Corinth – the Greco-Roman culture. There were

many gods and goddesses that they worshipped and much immorality. People were filled with pleasure seeking and self-indulgence. The church in Ephesus didn't seem to have the same problems as the church in Corinth, possibly because it was newer and just getting started. Paul wrote a letter to them to help them see the significance and importance of what happened to them in becoming Christians so they would no longer live like the people around them and the way they once were.

Chapter 4 is what we're going to look at and it's right in the middle of the book at a transition point between Paul's description of what had happened to them in becoming Christians and how they should live in light of it. So we're going to see what he has to say and try to come away with a better grasp of just how important this thing is that we're part of.

Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

So it's obvious that these verses have to do with a change of life – living in a different way because of what they were now a part of. In verse 1 Paul urges them to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which they had been called” and I want to explore that a little bit. What kind of calling does he have in mind? You can look at a calling kind of like an induction into something or being enlisted in or appointed to something. As Christians we've been enlisted in something that Paul is saying we should live our lives in a manner worthy of.

Paul talks about what that calling is in the first three chapters of this book and it seems that it's stated most clearly at the end of chapter 2.

Read Ephesians 2:12-22.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing

wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

This describes the calling Paul's talking about in chapter 4. It's a calling out of a life of darkness and sin, far from God and without hope, into a new life of great honor, position and purpose. They had once been pagans, wandering through life aimlessly, with nothing better than to pursue their own fleeting pleasure and self-indulgence, strangers and aliens to God and his kingdom, but through Christ they had been called by God to become fellow citizens with the saints and members of his household – a household established by Jesus Christ himself, and being built into something glorious – a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

It's easy to hear that or read those words and not sense the gravity of what they mean. We're talking about the Almighty God, Creator of the Universe, the Self-Existent one who has no beginning and no end, the One through whom and by whom all things exist, the Source and Author of all life, the King of the Universe before whom every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth – this God has created human beings, who rebelled against him, but whom he is in the process of redeeming and renewing through Christ and building them into a holy temple to become a dwelling place for him. The Almighty, transcendent God of the heavens is making his dwelling among us and the "place" that he's doing that is in us – we are his temple, his body.

God is redeeming and gathering a people for himself so that we can become a dwelling place for him. That's who we are. That's the church. That's what we've been called into and have become part of through Christ. The church is the dwelling place of God. That's us brothers and sisters of East Lincoln. That's what Paul was trying to convey to the people of Ephesus.

Peter envisioned that same glorious calling when he wrote this in 1 Peter 2:5: *“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

On the scale of importance, this far outweighs anything else – far more important than being in the military, than any career, than being a firefighter, than being on the football or basketball team. None of these even comes close in importance. Being a member of the household of God and being part of a holy temple that is being built into a dwelling place for God is the most important thing anyone can be part of and something that should change the way we live our lives.

That’s what Paul was saying to the people in Ephesus: *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”* The calling was so important that Paul was in prison for it – sitting in Rome under house arrest awaiting trial before Nero. He was willing to suffer and die to live out this calling and he eventually did, as did most of the other apostles.

How important is this calling to us? How seriously do we take our place in being part of Christ’s church? If you’re like me, you need this reminder today.

I can see why Paul prayed the prayers he prayed in the book of Ephesians, because we need God to reveal to us how incredible our calling is. In Chapter 1 he prayed this: *“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.”* We need that same spirit of revelation.

In chapter 3 he prayed: *“I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

Lord, help us comprehend who we are in you! Give us eyes to see the gravity, immensity, and importance of this calling that you have called us into as members of your church, your dwelling place here on earth!

This calling should change our lives more than anything else, and we see that in what Paul wrote: *"I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

If God is building us together as his people to be a place for him to dwell, we must live in a way that promotes unity and peace with one another. How can God dwell in us if we are at odds with one another? Paul points out that there is only one body, and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is dwelling in and through us. We have been called into something that has only one version, not multiple ones. One purpose, not a variety of different ones.

Therefore in order to live in a manner worthy of our calling it must start with unity in the people of God. Strive for unity, be eager to maintain it. That means humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love. We must be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

That's the beginning of how our calling should change our lives. The church is a big deal, worthy enough for us to change our lives. Jesus died to make it happen. Paul went to prison because of it. Is it changing you? Are you becoming a vessel that God can live in and live through? I encourage you this week to read Ephesians 4, 5, and 6 to see some examples of how we can do that. Ask the Lord to point out things from your old way of life that you need to put off and things he wants you to put on so that you live in a manner worthy of the calling you've received.